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ABSTRACT

A project was designed to assist older unemployed people in London, England, with the transition to education, vocational training, and employment. The project involved the development of a local tourist guide course at Thames Polytechnic (England), the accreditation of this course, and employment of some of the participants as local tourist guides. A survey that received 24 responses (of 285 questionnaires) and interviews with 11 unemployed adults identified the education, training, and leisure interests of people over 40. The tourist guide course was developed by the polytechnic's continuing education unit in cooperation with the borough of Greenwich (England). The main issues arising from the project were: (1) the cultural and economic problems of transition from paid work to unemployment and then to education; (2) the attitudes of employers toward older unemployed adults; and (3) how education can best prepare adults for paid work. It was recommended that: (1) educational providers should use a range of strategies and programs for older people; (2) providers should study the age profiles of their students and the target population; and (3) providers should keep abreast of forthcoming or recent layoffs in the community. (NLA)

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Opportunities for the Older Unemployed

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Opportunities for the Older Unemployed

An investigation of education and training needs and opportunities for unwaged adults in their 40s and 50s

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RP296

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FOREWORD

Background

This detailed study was carried out at Thames Polytechnic's Continuing Education Unit (CEU). The work of the unit is concerned with opening up the resources of the polytechnic to potential students who do not normally profit from them, in particular those without formal educational qualifications and without paid work. This FEU REPLAN project (RP296) developed from these general interests, but focused on three issues of particular concern: older unemployed adults, the assessment and use of prior learning, and transitions or changes in life roles.

Long-term unemployment is closely correlated with age, and it is people in their late 40s and 50s who suddenly find themselves out of work who are least likely to find further waged employment opportunities. Such people have as much as 20 years of a conventional working life in front of them with little or no prospect of finding employment. They are also a relatively invisible group who may receive a disproportionately low share of the education and training resources that are available to the unemployed in general.

For these older unemployed adults, who typically have accumulated skills and competences in a wide range of activities, the business of assessing and using prior learning is complex. The assessment includes individual and group processes of reflection, evaluation and documentation. Only with the fostering of personal confidence and self-esteem is it possible to realise the vocational value of prior learning.

The third concern of the project was to develop a more detailed sense of the important transitions that many older unemployed people will necessarily experience if they are to make the change from unwaged to waged work successfully. In particular, the project focused on the transitions from unemployment to education, from education to vocational training and from vocational training back into employment.

Content

This report concentrates on the experiences of older unemployed people and the educational provision that was developed in response to their experience. The positive use of experience resulted in the formation of a local tourist guide course, the accreditation of this course, and employment for some of the group as local tourist guides.

The report outlines the local background and the project work. In particular, there is an account of outreach work, its problems and achievements, and a valuable report of the experience and perceptions of some older unemployed people.

In Chapter 3, there is an account of the creation of the tourist guide course and the establishment of the examining board, which included representatives of the borough and education and training providers. This board was able to endorse accreditation compatible with other awards, which included appropriate methods of assessment and evaluation.

The final chapters of the report highlight the main issues arising from the project work, identify conclusions and list recommendations for providers. The issues are concerned with the cultural and economic problems of transition from paid work to unemployment and from unemployment to education, the attitudes of providers towards older unemployed adults and the problems of how education can best prepare people for the transition to paid work. The recommendations to providers include developing specific strategies for the older unemployed, and increasing the ability to respond directly to initiatives from unemployed people.

Target audience

This report is relevant to those involved in provision for older adults, particularly the older unemployed. Staff involved in adult and community education and outreach work should find the account of the positive use of experience and the issues raised from this work of particular interest.

Elizabeth Weightman
Development Officer
Further Education Unit

1 SETTING THE SCENE

The aim of this report is to raise awareness of the education and training needs of older unemployed people and to demonstrate a possible response. The target group is not homogeneous; there are marked class and gender differences, but also common features associated with age which are relevant to providers of education and training.

The project was a two-year, two-part action research programme consisting of outreach work and piloting of provision. The programme was divided into three main phases. The first eight months included familiarisation with the area, its educational agencies and local characteristics. The second phase established the possibilities for Making Experience Count (MEC) Groups (FEU, 1987) and other experimental provision, and the third phase consisted of overseeing, monitoring and evaluating this provision. The main part of the action research involved the establishment of a vocational programme geared to the experience of older unemployed people. This programme – a tourist guide scheme – revealed a number of central issues concerning the economic reintegration of older unemployed people.

The project arose out of experience gained by the Continuing Education Unit (CEU) of Thames Polytechnic. Through its projects, community education and education advice work, the CEU was conscious of the under-representation of older unwaged people in education and training provision. This under-representation is replicated elsewhere: a survey conducted in Wolverhampton, for example, showed that middle-aged men, especially, were heavily under-represented (*Colleges and Unemployed Adults*, 1983, p. 23). In addition, the incidence of long-term unemployment increases with age. In 1986, the proportion of the registered unemployed who had been without work over one year was 40% (London Strategic Policy Unit, 1986). For London, the figure was 43% for men and 31% for women. It rises sharply with age: in the 50–59 age group, 60% had been unemployed for one to two years (*Social Trends*, 1986, p. 73). These figures do not include unwaged women or those who had ceased to register as unemployed.

The CEU is involved, through the Greenwich Education and Training Advice services (GRETA), in a major programme of educational advice and counselling. The unit has, in addition, significant experience in the assessment of experiential learning programmes, such as MEC. Such programmes aim to build confidence, advise on existing education and training opportunities, and prepare for further study, community involvement or paid work. Older people, both waged and unwaged, possess much knowledge gained through experience during their working lives, as well as some formal qualifications. The informal learning and formal certification often comes in unrelated packets which people find difficult to put together in order to provide an overall assessment of their skills and to approach the next step in their lives. It was envisaged that MEC could help meet this need. The project also recognised that new kinds of provision might be required. This pointed to the need for locally based research.

FAMILIARISATION WITH THE LOCAL AREA

The London Borough of Greenwich is one of the eight inner London boroughs marked by a particularly sharp rise in unemployment during the last decade. The number of registered unemployed rose from 3.8% in October 1979 to 13.8% in March 1986, a total increase of 10,727 people (London Strategic Policy Unit, 1986). Borough statistics for 1981 give 11.9% male and 6.9% female unemployment. It was extremely difficult to discover with any accuracy the proportion of long-term unemployed people within these figures. For example, figures provided by Deptford Jobcentre at the start of the project gave the number between 40 and 54 years of age as 883 out of a total of 5,500. Six months later these were revised dramatically upwards without any apparent economic or demographic changes occurring in the area.

Work patterns in the borough have changed with the decline of heavy waterfront industries – the docks – and mechanical engineering.

The London Docklands Development is affecting Greenwich and may improve employment opportunities, although the borough is marked by contrasts ranging from the affluent areas of Blackheath and the tourist area of central Greenwich, to the poverty of the Ferrier Estate and Deptford. The borough is also racially mixed, with Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities and significant numbers of Chinese and Vietnamese. Cultural contrasts – economic, demographic and ethnic – are reflected in varied patterns of unemployment and in education and training provision. Based on the 1981 census, the borough defined West Greenwich as a No. 1 stress area. The percentage of the population aged between 40 and 55 decreased between 1971 and 1981. The number of people aged 45 to retirement age fell by 20% over that period. People within the age band 45–59 (female) and 45–64 (men) account for 19% of the borough's population (40,411 people). The proportion in West Greenwich is slightly higher at 20%.

It was decided that the project should concentrate on West Greenwich, in which there was very little educational provision of any kind and within which, impressionistic evidence suggested, high numbers of working-class adults within the targeted age range would be found.

LOCAL PROVISION

Education

Greenwich is part of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) and educational provision in higher, further and adult education institutions is open to unemployed adults on payment of a nominal fee. The area has two institutions of higher education (HE), two further education (FE) colleges, and two adult education (AE) institutes, both operating on various sites. While older students have access to all this provision, some institutions, departments and tutors have particularly encouraged participation by older people. Provision which consistently attracts older people includes: a polytechnic part-time access course, a New Opportunities for Women (NOW) course, an 'Open Routes' course, run jointly by a college of HE and an adult education institute offering further return-to-study provision, and a grant-aided access course for members of ethnic minority groups.

Part-time courses for adults in the borough include: an assessment of prior learning course (Making Experience Count), a number of courses for the unemployed such as 'Open Access' and 'Women and Technology', and Manpower Services Commission (MSC) (now Training Agency) Restart courses. In 1986, a newsletter focusing on the specific needs of older students was started.

Community education

The local adult education institutes provide non-vocational courses for a nominal fee for unwaged people, including Fresh Start courses and basic education courses. The majority of these are not specifically directed at unemployed people. Those that do target unemployed people include the Tourist Guide course (which arose out of this project), a drop-in centre and a project for unemployed and homeless men. The institutes also have Community Education workers.

Community education is also provided by the non-statutory sector. Greenwich Employment Resource Unit (GERU) organises outreach work throughout the borough in community centres, church halls, etc., in an attempt to reach unwaged people who have little contact with statutory provision. Ethnic groups, including Asian, Vietnamese and Chinese, run their own courses.

Training

The London Borough of Greenwich runs its own training schemes, which are open to all ages. However, this does not necessarily encourage older people to apply. It is recognised that disadvantaged groups need visibility within the rubric of equal opportunities, but there is no evidence of the same policy being applied for the benefit of the older unwaged. (Discussion with personnel staff was enlightening in this respect. It was maintained that borough advertising did not discriminate against older people, although no reference to this group is made in publicity materials. It was, however, agreed that other disadvantaged groups, such as those with disabilities, required specific mention to combat discrimination.)

The borough has an Employment Development Unit which provides funds and offers advice on starting up small businesses. Training is also provided by GERU, which has particular expertise in developing co-operatives.

Centres for the unemployed

Unemployment groups, including the Greenwich Action Group on Unemployment (GAGOU), organise occasional courses in Woolwich. This Group also operates as a drop-in centre for the unemployed. There are a number of drop-in lunch centres for unemployed people.

One scheme, mainly for older people of pensionable age, provides skill exchange workshops. The skills and experience of older people are harnessed to contribute to the education of final-year schoolchildren. There is also an over-40s club which provides leisure activities and sports coaching.

Another unemployment group attracts users in the 20–30 age group. This group has organised some training courses, with driving courses being particularly popular. It also operates as an umbrella organisation for a number of other projects – for example, music-making and adult education institute courses such as 'Coping with Unemployment'.

Community centres

There are a number of community centres. Some have education sub-committees; all host a range of activities, including adult education institute courses. At the time of research, some of these were thriving centres of activity in a welcoming environment; refreshment facilities enable people to call in without committing themselves to more formal participation. Others have suffered from an association with elderly groups and long-established clubs. Changes were, however, taking place during the project. The opening and reopening of a number of tenants' halls on council estates was envisaged as providing a further base for community provision.

Educational advice services

The previous paragraphs have detailed some of the formal and informal education, training and leisure provision available for adults in the project area. The variety itself can be confusing. Much of the non-statutory provision is transitory. An education and training advice

service exists in order to help people through the maze of information. The service is extended by a range of outreach community activities. Older people, however, remain a low proportion of clients.

2 MAKING A START

The initial stage of the project consisted of two main activities: first, becoming familiar with the local area and establishing links with its education, training and leisure agencies; second, making contact with adults within the target group and identifying their perspectives, aspirations and attitudes to education and training provision. This chapter describes visits to various agencies, contacts with the target group, the methods by which these contacts were made, and the difficulties encountered at this stage. These activities were to be influential in the direction of the project.

A range of agencies providing education, training and leisure for long-term unemployed people were visited. It was necessary to approach a broad range of agencies and venues since older people do not form an easily recognisable, coherent or homogeneous group. These agencies included statutory providers of education, training and leisure (the educational institutions, the community centres, Jobcentres and dole offices), and non-statutory agencies. In some places, questionnaires were used by the project staff to assist in the identification of education and training needs (see Chapter 3).

CONTACT WITH THE TARGET GROUP

Contact with the local FE colleges was mainly to exchange information, although discussion on a Restart programme did include suggestions for the active involvement of the project. College courses which are specifically geared for the unwaged, such as the Open Access course, and more recently Restart, attract a small number of older students. It was proposed that Restart students be offered MEC as an option on completing the course.

One adult education institute was represented on the steering committee of the project and access to older students was made possible by this close collaboration.

Visits were made to the training agencies in the borough, and the possibility of a joint survey of older unwaged people was discussed. One agency assisted with questionnaire respondents and provided advice and support in the initial stages of the tourist guide scheme.

Both the education and training advice shop and outreach bus were used as venues for contacting older adults. Enquirers aged over 40 were referred to the project worker for counselling by the GRETA staff and some of these referrals led to in-depth interviews.

A table was set up in a local Jobcentre for the joint use of GRETA and the project. A number of people who were approached refused to complete a questionnaire. Questionnaires were left with the member of staff at the Jobcentre responsible for the register of long-term unemployed, but none were returned. Staff at another Jobcentre offered the questionnaire to interviewees and displayed publicity material on MEC.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The enquiry aimed to encourage respondents to express their aspirations while exploring the forms of provision which might be useful.

While the invisibility of older people among the long-term unemployed in general was an issue, the gender dimensions of that invisibility was a particular concern. Women are less difficult to contact than men. Their social networks are neighbourhood based. Even women who had been in full-time paid work are likely to have local networks associated with, for example, child-rearing. Women are also more likely to have contact with local educational provision.

Older men however – especially those who have been made redundant – become socially invisible. It is also well known that men are under-represented on adult education courses. It was decided to emphasise the issue of male unemployment among older people, particularly because, in this area at least, the working knowledge of women is far better than that of men. The support committee could draw on a deeper pool of experience of working with women and, over the previous five years, the CEU had run courses for more than 800 adults, over 90% of whom were women. All these students were subject to a monitoring and follow-up programme. This teaching experience was available during this project and informed its development and conclusions.

The issue of 'invisibility' is particularly important for men living on their own. Of the male interviewees in the sample, only two lived in family units. Although this is demographically unusual, it did enable a study to be made of extreme examples of the difficulties encountered by people outside typical kin networks. There are some general lessons to be learnt from these particular cases.

The issue of target group contact remained a matter of concern throughout the project. It was discussed with people representing expertise from a range of agencies including REPLAN, the Lewisham Unemployment Group and FEU project workers. Local agencies referred to the importance of personal contact. An over-40s club had found that the most successful form of publicity was advertising in the local press. This experience contrasted sharply, however, with the poor response to MEC advertisements placed in the same local papers. Personality was also a factor in the success of the over-40s club. One woman energised the committee of volunteers and provided the club with its warm and welcoming atmosphere.

The most direct contact with the target group was through the offices of GAGOU. A letter was sent to older members inviting them to attend a meeting and hear about the project. Of the ten adults invited, four turned up and a further four made contact by other means. The purpose of the meeting was to determine how to contact older unemployed adults and what educational provision they required. A wide-ranging discussion covered the nature of unemployment, the role of trade unions, the characteristics of the unemployed, the role of unemployment centres, and existing provision. A chance remark made by one of the group to illustrate a point came to determine the main outcomes of the project. The group member described the frustration he had experienced in trying to get his idea for a tourist guide scheme approved by the local borough.

The experience at GAGOU suggested that a similar gathering could and should be organised at another community centre. There was an enthusiastic response to the questionnaire from the management. An introduction to an older unemployed person, active in the community centre, provided a useful contact. Contact was also made with three

tenants' groups on the two local estates, and with two caretakers. Tenants' committee members were given questionnaires for distribution, and MEC posters were displayed in the centre and bar.

However, a promising start ended in disappointment. After much labour-intensive activity, one person came to the meeting and contact was made with another. Although both contacts led to interviews, further work at the centre was considered unproductive. Why should such an auspicious start have ended in such poor results? Was the approach to outreach work flawed?

The initial enthusiasm for the project expressed by the manager and tenants' committee waned. Without a constant reminder of the project, other commitments took over. Various initiatives to contact the older unwaged through a local community free newspaper and local community group leaders were also unsuccessful.

This chapter has introduced the range of work covered during the first phase of the project. The stage can be characterised as defining the particular in order to refine the general aims of the project. It was a period of labour-intensive activity; a very wide range of contacts is required to explore how to approach the target group. At the same time, attention was paid to developing the 'givens' of the project: namely, a questionnaire for older unwaged people, and the organisation and tutoring of the MEC course. These substantive areas are described in the next chapter.

3 MAIN ACTIVITIES

THE QUESTIONNAIRES

The project steering committee had a number of discussions on the usefulness of attempting a large-scale questionnaire. It was pointed out that general response rates are low, and that questionnaires are costly to produce and disseminate, difficult to code, and not helpful in developing a picture of peoples' experiences or aspirations. Nevertheless, large-scale questionnaires keep a useful check on unrepresentative reporting from work with small groups. They provide a survey of the situation, and could give some basic data. It was therefore decided that an attempt should be made to use a questionnaire, if only to test the value of the doubts expressed.

Two versions of the questionnaire were produced, one for general use and one adapted for older students attending adult education institute classes. The questionnaire was intended to provide skeletal information about attitudes of the target group to education, training and leisure, and to introduce respondents to the possibility of participating in these activities. The questions, therefore, attempted to identify areas of knowledge and skill where respondents felt confident, their reasons for not taking up existing provision, and to provide a list of existing and potential provision to stimulate aspiration. (Copies of the questionnaires with a full breakdown of replies to each question are available from the FEU Information Centre.)

Survey of education, training and leisure interests of people over 40

Of the 285 questionnaires, distributed to community agencies, through known individuals, and in the Jobcentres, 24 were completed and returned – a response rate of just over 8%. Of the respondents, 18 were male, 5 female and 1 unspecified. A number of reasons were identified for the small number of returns. A questionnaire which fails to offer tangible suggestions is perhaps likely to be of little interest to older people looking for work. Unemployment itself seems to depress the level of interest in alternatives, at least after a period of time. When they first became redundant, some respondents expected to do all those things they had never had enough time for while working. After a while, however, their concern with getting a job excluded other interests: 'It seems wrong to do something you enjoy during the day'. People who attended Jobcentres to seek employment possibly considered questions about their leisure and educational interests irrelevant. This is partially confirmed by the differing responses obtained in different venues. At one Jobcentre, people were reluctant to fill in the questionnaire; whilst outside the then DHSS most of those approached were willing to do so.

From the replies received, age emerges as a factor which respondents perceived as affecting their prospects. Over half the respondents (15) considered some form of training would help them get a job, although more (17) expected to be told that they were too old. Age also influenced the way in which educational activity was perceived: 15 considered themselves too old.

In the section of the questionnaire which listed possible courses, those courses offering a recognised skill or practical help for employment were the most popular. Training as a tourist guide, setting up a business,

and joining a taster course all scored 12 – that is, 50% of the respondents. Only one suggestion scored higher: 13 indicated interest in MEC. This is a double anomaly, given the poor recruitment to MEC. All these respondents were sent further information about the course and contacted personally where possible, but none joined.

The project ran two courses – the tourist guide course and the MEC – and had received good responses. The relatively high response to MEC which failed to materialise in practice suggests that more follow-up and other methods of outreach may be needed to get results. Almost all respondents (22) chose to provide their name and address for further contact and information. All were sent information about GRETA as well as about MEC and the tourist guide course, and other specific information (where requested). Five of the respondents were interviewed.

Questionnaire for older students attending AEI classes

The second questionnaire, for older students attending Thamesside AEI, was distributed to 250 students by class tutors. The return rate was 34% – 86 questionnaires, 6 of which were discounted on grounds of age. Of the respondents, 61 were female.

Employment status

Thirty-five (44%) respondents were identified as being unwaged, and 45 (56%) in paid work. Among the 35 unwaged respondents, the length of time given as unwaged was: up to one year, 5; up to 2 years, 2; up to 3 years, 4. At the other end of the scale, 3 students had been unwaged for between 10 and 30 years, and 2 for over 30 years. Eleven students (14%) identified improving their chance of employment as their reason for attending classes. Just under half of these (5) were identified as unwaged.

Use of the adult education institute

The main role of the adult education institute was seen by the respondents as concerning leisure activities. The reason for attending given by 74% of all respondents was 'to follow a special interest or hobby'. This was also the main reason given by the unwaged. The second most commonly claimed function of the institute was a social one, with 32% wanting to meet other people and 16% attending to 'get out of the house'. This pattern was again repeated among the unwaged. Of less importance was the aim to 'catch up what you missed out on at school', given by 6 (8%) of the respondents, half of these being unwaged.

Suggestions for classes were (apart from yoga and local history) mainly skill acquisition – carpentry, motor fitting, building and tiling (all from the unwaged). Eight of the unwaged respondents indicated lack of interest in further classes. This raises the question of how unwaged adults view the relevance of study/leisure to their situation.

Other forms of education

Thirty-five (44%) respondents expressed an interest in other types of adult education. The majority (27) of these wanted part-time rather than full-time (4) courses. Top of the preference list were floristry, setting up your own business and DIY; next came taster courses in painting and decorating, followed by training as a tourist guide. All these courses offer practical skill training, and three of them potential employment. The choice was similar for waged and unwaged. Classes aimed particularly at the unwaged received low responses.

Publicity

The main sources of information for courses at the adult education institute were leaflets and posters (36 respondents, 45%) and word of mouth (34, 43%). The low response (4, 5%) to adverts in the local paper

is perhaps surprising. The three referrals from GRETA came from people not in paid work.

Comparison of the two questionnaires indicates that perceived barriers to education and leisure activities, such as cost of enrolment and fares, do not generally constitute a barrier to further involvement for people already familiar with adult education. The question to resolve, therefore, was how to make education a possible option for a majority of older unemployed people in the first place. From the experience with the interviewees, it was realised that personal contact, especially in the context of an in-depth interview, enabled the majority to explore possibilities and join courses.

INTERVIEWS

A small group of interviews were conducted to explore attitudes to long-term unemployment. The eleven interviewees were selected from respondents to the street questionnaire (2), from the MEC courses (3), and from contacts made through the various agencies (6). The method was qualitative, in-depth interviews. The open-ended questions covered the following areas:

- employment: its forms and stability;
- unemployment: experiences since paid work;
- attitudes to unemployment: short term and long term, economic changes;
- familial relationships and job-searching activities;
- statutory schooling, qualifications, post-school, education training;
- attitudes, access and knowledge;
- leisure activity;
- structuring of the day;
- activities, meals;
- social networks;
- the future: pre-retirement, suggestions for support, and dreams and aspirations.

Eight of the eleven people interviewed were male and three female. Six people were aged between 40 and 50, and five over 50. Eight of the interviewees were living alone; only two, both married men, claimed stable, long-term conjugal relationships. All had previously been in paid employment, six in manual work, five primarily in non-manual work. The pattern of employment fell into two main groups:

- history of continuous employment in one main job or type of job throughout their working lives;
- stable employment in a range of jobs requiring differing skills.

A third group with an unstable pattern of employment – 'flitting' from job to job – embraced two interviewees: 'I'm a bit of a drifter, now no longer jobs to drift to'. Periods of unemployment ranged from one to eight years. Nine of the interviewees had received no formal education after 15 years of age. One had had some further education in the RAF. Another had done two years of a five-year part-time course, but had dropped it because of the difficulty of combining work and study. Most had had some form of training, although not necessarily in the area of their last job.

Response to unemployment

The respondents fell into two distinct groups:

- those whose response to unemployment was participation in a wide range of community activities as an almost satisfactory substitute for paid work;
- those who rejected all alternatives to paid work.

Despite significant cultural differences in respondents, some broad similarities were discernible in the processes of becoming one of 'the unemployed'. Three to four main periods emerge. The first may be marked by high expectations of alternative work:

> 'I'd have done anything. . . . What you didn't realise was at that time they [other industries] were also tightening up . . . In the dock you were closed in by that dock fence. We didn't know much about the outside and of course we thought, "it's only the docks that's closing, and anyone will want a dock worker".'

For others, unemployment ended the years of tedium and strain, and the first reaction was to take a holiday.

In the second period, six to nine months later, is an increasing awareness of the seriousness of the situation. Worry sets in, and there is a determined effort to find work. Failure to find work after this period of activity leads to a third period characterised by disillusion. Interviewees said that they became depressed and less active in seeking employment. Some expressed a fourth stage when they gave up hope of work and began to 'live the best way I can'; 'can't see myself working again'.

The loss of confidence and poor self-assessment which long-term unemployed adults suffer was expressed in terms of: 'shame'; 'stigma'; 'very degrading, frustrating at times'. Paid employment provides status and its loss was deeply felt: 'You see, having a job really . . . it's like a protection . . . people respect you . . . if you take that away . . . you have nothing . . . you become a nobody'. This led to social isolation, which was particularly extreme amongst males and one female, all seemingly without kinship or friendship networks.

Economic effects of unemployment

The loss of a wage affects people differently. Much depends on their familial relationships and household circumstances. The distinguishing feature of the respondents, however, was their isolation. Only two of the men were living within their nuclear family. Their wives both worked, and one had a son contributing to the household income. These married men expressed their concern about money primarily in terms of not wanting to 'live off' their partners. They spoke of the adjustments required in their conjugal relationships once they were no longer the main breadwinner. Guilt imposed restrictions on leisure activities:

> 'You see, one of the things that I find very hard is seeing the wife go out. You feel that there's got to be something in this house that you can do. I feel that I've got to make up to her that she's out at work; I've got to do something. But, whatever I do is never right, she'd rather do it herself. So there's never much more to do than wash up, or keep the place a bit clean. So I try and get myself out more. I think I could go up to so and so's, or I could go to that class or club. But then again, I feel guilty doing that while she's out at work, and I think, what can I do here indoors. Probably nothing.'

For those living alone, money was a very evident source of worry. One interviewee was living on his savings. He expressed pride in not being on social security, but was unaware that he lost certain benefits by not signing on. Others were coping by using redundancy or severance pay and savings to supplement their unemployment benefit.

The worry of such financial restraints is de-energising. 'Living on a budget', 'watching every penny' for one woman meant using the washing machine and the hoover on alternate weeks. One single man admitted, 'I've become good at scrounging, and I don't like it'. People felt that accepting jobs with low pay and the subsequent loss of benefits such as rent allowances put them in the 'poverty trap'.

Most of the interviewees made a conscious effort to keep active. Male interviewees referred to the amount of walking they did, both to save money and to help keep fit. Periods of lack of energy, however, were also noted: 'Sometimes tired all day'; 'can't get out during the day'; 'lack of energy'; 'although try to keep fit'.

Financial worry thus appeared to affect the interviewees' energy and hence their pursuit not only of work but also of retraining, education and leisure activities. This premise was explored further by asking people how they spent their day.

How the day is spent

It was evident that a barrier existed to using the day for activities not associated with work. Daytime is perceived as working time, not time for leisure. Daytime activities emphasise unemployment: 'don't watch TV much'; 'read at night, not during the day'; 'it could be because if I sit inside during the day I'd feel a bit lazy'. Some found it difficult to account for how their days were spent. As all interviewees had been unemployed for some time, they were at the stage where more thought than action was given to hunting for work. Some respondents gave 'job searching' as an explanation of their non-involvement in community activities. Yet the actual time spent on this activity diminished significantly as the weeks went by. All interviewees had passed through the active period of job-hunting.

Two main responses emerged on the use of time: the first can be described as super-activity. In order to replace the loss of paid work, some responded by working voluntarily in the community; one man attended classes almost full-time and others had embarked on various schemes. The second response was more passive: activities were primarily associated with the home such as watching television and reading.

The activists

One interviewee (B) was active in a community centre. B was introduced to a researcher as a useful contact for other unemployed people. He was on a range of committees associated with a community centre. B presented himself as a confident and competent individual who responded positively to the idea of the project. He was enthusiastic about this work on the committees of the community centre, referring to them as 'my' committees. He had enjoyed a course on committee skills run at the community centre. His social life flowed from this activity. In return for his voluntary work, he was able to go on outings and other activities arranged by the social club. His days were spent at the centre. He found this work more satisfying than his experience of paid work, and was happy to continue in this way.

An interview with B took place six months after the first meeting. The former confidence and interests were no longer apparent. He was no longer chair of 'his' committee, had been dropped from others, and turned down for a paid job in another local community centre. No matter what events had led to this, it meant the loss of feeling useful and being active, and the loss of a place in which to spend the day legitimately. He now felt less able to drop into the centre. 'Sometimes I think, "What did I think about in the last hour?" Sometimes the answer is "nothing".' The loss of involvement had not only psychological but also social effects. His social life was severely curtailed, and, most significantly, he now felt the experience of being unemployed far more

keenly. One way of coping with unemployment that had seemed even a positive alternative to paid work was now denied him.

Activity, then, is perceived as worthwhile and accords unemployed people a sense of purpose and self-esteem. However, the rules and mores of community activism are not as clear cut as the familiar relations of paid work. However problematic paid working relations might be, status accompanies the wage packet. For unwaged people, activity is complicated. In order to compensate for the loss of working status, unwaged people feel the need to overstate the importance of their contribution. This phenomenon became strikingly evident in the later stages of the project.

Education, training and leisure

Interviewees were asked for their attitude to attending courses during the daytime. An ambivalent attitude to education emerged. Some felt that the lack of alternative skills and qualifications contributed to their continuing unemployment, but most referred to the difficulty of even thinking about courses rather than seeking work. Thus education was a 'bit of a blind spot'. The words of one interviewee sum up the general response:

> 'People say to you, "You're not working, why don't you do something during the day?" But then during the day you're thinking about work . . . not thinking doing leisure. People who are wealthy, they think that way; but a man without any money . . . with children . . . I'm thinking about their future . . . I'm not getting any younger in age. That's what occupies my mind at the moment, and getting full-time work'.

The one exception to this was a man who extended the number of classes he had attended while in work; but as he was currently 'on the panel' (sick), he did not feel the same pressure to find work. Questioned further, some felt that there were no appropriate courses. Even those who had had expectations of taking up leisure interests now they had the time failed to do so. Respondents' perceptions about actual and potential educational provision were very varied. They thought that facilities were not so readily available: 'It seems that as the work stopped, so a lot of these classes closed'.

Other interviewees felt the need for an extended academic year; the long summer holiday period can be particularly lonely for unemployed people. Of the eleven people interviewed, eight went on to participate in some local educational provision.

Jobcentres

Most people had visited a Jobcentre each week during the early period of unemployment, but this dropped to '1 day in 10' and 'now and again'. After some time the original purpose became inconsequential. A visit was better than to 'end up not doing anything', and they did provide some shelter. A range of centres had been tried: 'I used to go to the Jobcentres and I've been as far as the City, into Dulwich. I used to go all over the place'. Not surprisingly, given their continued unemployment, most interviewees held a low opinion of Jobcentres. Specific criticisms included their being difficult to use and their unhelpfulness: 'been going since 1980, let them know I'd do any job, but nothing'.

Rehabilitation centres

Two people had been sent by the then DHSS to rehabilitation centres. In neither case had it led to employment. For one interviewee, it had been a difficult experience, underlining the possible inappropriateness of such schemes for older people. She was presented with the choice of a seven-week residential course at Egham or loss of her benefit. At the centre she had to share a room, a disturbing experience ('dreaded it') for a single middle-aged woman used to living on her own. The course consisted of being given a piece of plastic to make a knife – which she was unable to do because of injury to her arm – and English, maths and office work such as filing. 'Didn't learn anything. Already spent 30 years

doing it.' She was next sent to a 'school for unemployed' at Dartford to be informed, 'No good you coming here, you're too advanced'. The indignity was still keenly felt five years after this experience.

In contrast to this, another interviewee attended a centre in Croydon: 'It's for people like myself, middle-aged and disabled people . . . I liked it, to me it was like six weeks holidays'. It had provided social contact, some money and, for the period of the course, removed the need to look for work.

Job agencies

Eight interviewees had tried commercial job agencies, but had given up using them: 'Often a waste of time – sitting, waiting for things to come in'.

Community Programme

Those who had heard of the Community Programme either considered it irrelevant to their situation or generally dismissed it on the grounds of low pay and impermanence.

Job interviews

Interviewees' experience of job hunting was demoralising and exhausting. They felt belittled by the lack of response to applications: even if a stamped addressed envelope was sent, employers 'still don't bother to reply'. Interviews were seen as presenting a special problem to people of this age group. It was felt that, in the years since their first job, attitudes had changed, requiring different forms of self-presentation which worked against them.

The age factor

Age featured as a factor in the lives of the interviewees. It was considered to be a barrier to re-employment and the cause of some discrimination. One respondent claimed that Jobcentre staff advised him to accept temporary part-time work because 'You'll never get a full-time job again, so don't start looking for one'. He therefore concluded that 'A man of my age [50] has got no chance of getting a full-time job again, so I have to just accept things the way they are . . . '.

Strong feelings of rejection were expressed:

> 'We've got to the stage now where the old don't count . . . The young don't care if they've got a job or not . . . don't cater for the 45- to 60-year-olds . . . Think you should retire.'
>
> 'Society doesn't care for the middle-aged. It's a matter of fact of life.'

The age factor also inhibits the pursuit of educational options:

> 'We had a talk [at a class] a few weeks ago about business studies. I do feel I'm a bit old though . . . well, for the money that all these courses cost . . . if it takes four years I'll be getting on for fifty. I mean about the cost to the government . . . and then would employers want you at fifty?'

Age can also be a problem to those who do join courses:

> 'I felt very complex when I went there first, walking through the corridors and there's all these young people there, the ages of my children . . . if I walk into the computer room and it's crowded . . . even if there was one machine there, no way could I walk in amongst all those young people and take that machine.'

Age contributes powerfully to the negative experience of being unwaged for a long time. The respondents had not chosen early retirement. They were not prepared to consider themselves as of pensionable age; but, as the prospect of work diminished, they saw their lives being foreshortened.

Conclusion

If the experiences of older unwaged people are reflected in the responses of this small sample, it means that, despite the range of agencies and providers concerned with unemployed people, significant gaps in understanding exist between the unemployed and the advice

agencies. Agencies and providers are either unknown, or older unwaged people fail to identify with them. This dissonance is made more acute by the lack of any specific focus for older people within the agencies. There are not, for example, courses specifically addressed to older unemployed people. The proportion of people living on their own was unrepresentatively high in this sample; but the sample does illustrate the social isolation of older people and the lack of cultural support mechanisms for those without family and kinship networks.

MAKING EXPERIENCE COUNT

The CEU at Thames Polytechnic has, for some years, been experimenting with techniques designed to assess prior informal learning. If properly recognised, assessed and validated, such learning has been shown to provide a sound base for further study. Through systematic reflection and reappraisal, students produce a portfolio which contains descriptions of key experiences, what they have learned from these experiences, and evidence to support learning claims. The group tutor aims to keep the validity of the experience intact while extending the range of possible options available and the confidence to consider them. A range of techniques is used to unearth both recognised experience – those skills which are recognisable but lack certificated status – and other areas of experience which fall into less easily recognisable categories of achievement. The activity is learner centred, but dependent on group support. It is the group which is the major resource for both unearthing and then validating the individual's experience.

The project aimed to establish the importance of using experience in educational work with older people. In 1985/6, the project worker ran an MEC course at Thames Polytechnic for three hours a week. A second course was started the following year at the West Greenwich House Community Centre.

Recruitment of students

Recruitment took place through the CEU's customary distribution of leaflets and pamphlets throughout the borough, open meetings, and GRETA. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers, agencies were provided with leaflets, and posters were displayed in GAGOU, the then DHSS, Jobcentres, community centres, local libraries, etc. During the course, students made their own posters for use in a range of venues including a launderette, betting shop, and doctors' surgery. A former MEC student sent an open letter about the course to the local press and a community newsletter. Ten students joined the course: seven female, three male. Of these, two younger people were directed to other courses; the remainder were all over 40. The response did not reflect the amount of publicity. Five people came from CEU general course publicity, the other students from a community centre poster, outreach work, GRETA, and student recommendation.

Reasons for the poor response were discussed in some detail by the project support committee. It was noted that MEC received less initial response from enquirers than did other CEU courses. As MEC does not fit traditional expectations of educational provision, it was thought that more explanation was required. There was a contradiction between the interest in MEC on the questionnaire response and the take-up rate.

Appraisal of the MEC course

Central to the course was the sharing of experiences. As all the students were over 40, it became apparent that most of them had common experiences relating both to particular historical events, such as the War, and to more general social developments. Discussion about the experience of primary schooling, for example, sparked off common reminiscences. These, in turn, allowed more theoretical points to be

made. Such sharing created a bond amongst the group which was invaluable. As a result of some vivid writing about the war years, a local historian visited the group and recorded these reminiscences.

The goal – the portfolio – gave direction to the course. Portfolio preparation is a lengthy process of individual and collective re-evaluation. Students often wrote several versions of their narrative or learning assessment before they were satisfied.

The group developed a cohesiveness and solidarity which provided support to individual members, extending beyond the classroom. A feeling of excitement was generated as students came to recognise their lives as a rich progression of experience worthy of private and public validation. The question of validation is discussed in Chapter 4.

TOURIST GUIDE PROJECT

Origins

The main activity of the project became support for a scheme to train older unemployed people as Greenwich tourist guides. This arose from direct contact with the target group – a chance remark by a participant at the GAGOU meeting. The 57-year-old ex-stevedore, who had been attempting to introduce the scheme for over 18 months, used it to illustrate what he saw as the general lack of interest in the concerns of older unemployed people. The scheme was taken up by the research project as it met a number of criteria relevant to its aims:

- it arose from the initiative of a local older unemployed person;
- it provided training which could take place in a broader educational context of interest in local social history;
- it had the potential to stimulate employment;
- it addressed older people, by positively evaluating their experience of residing and/or working in the borough;
- using local knowledge to become a tourist guide was directly linked to the aims of MEC.

Involvement in the tourist guide scheme came to provide a firsthand insight into a range of problems which may be encountered by older unwaged people who try to initiate opportunities for themselves.

The scheme

The aim of the scheme was for local unemployed people with few or no academic qualifications to train as tourist guides. They would gain a qualification, the possibility of some paid employment, or at least an interest. T.P, the initiator of the scheme, had qualified as a guide for the City of London and Clerkenwell after being made redundant from the docks. The established Blue Badge training for guides is prohibitive to most unwaged working-class people, both because of its financial cost and because of its academic requirements. The scheme was to produce guides who would utilise their local experience. Trainee guides would research their own history in the context of the social, economic and political history of the borough. The Greenwich Guides would thus be distinguished by being not only local unemployed people, but guides who would bring a close working knowledge of their borough, a knowledge which extended beyond the well-trodden tourist trips to the *Cutty Sark* and the Observatory. It was, therefore, intended from the outset to make a clear distinction between this concept of a tourist guide and that employed by the Blue Badge course.

The guides' course was to be combined with a business development scheme. On qualifying, guides would set up a tourist agency which would not only provide tours, but also offer for sale brochures researched by the guides and crafts by local unemployed and disabled

people. Coach tours would be introduced, tours organised for local schools, and a guide trained in sign language for the benefit of people with hearing impairments. The agency would provide work on a rota system. Sponsorship would be sought from local firms likely to benefit from the development of tourism.

The linchpin of the scheme was its authorisation by Greenwich Borough Council. Borough authorisation would give the guides status and public validation.

The first stage

Prior to the project's involvement, T.P. had approached a number of different agencies with his plans. Those approached ranged from local firms (for sponsorship), embassies (to develop tours) and tutors in the adult education institute, to councillors and borough officers for structural support. Considerable interest had been expressed in the scheme, but attempts to get Greenwich Borough to give active support had been unsuccessful – leading to bitterness and frustration.

The first stage for the research project entailed exploring the feasibility of the tourist guide scheme. Time was spent with T.P., trying to get a clear picture of his vision, exploring various tangents, and establishing what progress had already been made. The need was to differentiate between the desirable and the possible; the immediate from the long term. In the past, although no tangible support had been forthcoming, borough councillors had shown interest in the scheme. It was agreed that the first requirement was to reapproach the London Borough of Greenwich. Evidence of the scheme's viability would, it was felt, help to gain the necesary support from the borough. Thames Technet helped the scheme's initiator draw up a feasibility study to present to the borough.

Initial approaches to the borough indicated that the project worker would have to play a mediating role in order to remove misunderstandings between the individuals and the bureaucracy.

The second stage

The scheme was discussed in detail with councillors, and a written proposal was submitted to the Assistant Director of Greenwich Leisure Services.

The adult education institute representative on the support committee – a community education worker at Thamesside – proposed that the tourist guide course be run under the auspices of the institute. T.P. would be engaged as one of two tutors.

The course

Planning meetings were held with the institute, Thames Technet, the two tutors and the project worker. It was decided that the course would run in the summer term. 1986 had been designated Tourism Year for Greenwich. As ILEA support for the course was agreed, it was decided to combine that with support from two other agencies: Thames Polytechnic for academic accreditation, and the London Borough of Greenwich for sponsorship and additional financial support.

All those expressing interest in the guides' course, from the questionnaire and interviews, were contacted. Meetings were held with borough officers of the Leisure Services and Employment Development Unit to ensure support for the proposals by the tourism sub-committee. Thames Polytechnic registry and the academic planning and resources committee at Thames agreed to certification and to the contribution of an examining board to monitor the course. West Greenwich House Community Centre was asked to provide accommodation.

In mid-March, the proposal for the tourist guide scheme was presented by the two tutors and the project worker to the tourism sub-committee and was adopted unanimously.

The borough gave its support on the basis that the course was being organised by the adult education institute, with ILEA agreement, and was being accredited by Thames Polytechnic. Thames Polytechnic was approached on the basis that the borough was involved in the scheme, thus enabling the polytechnic to extend its community base. The names of those who had agreed, in principle, to serve on the prospective examining board were included in the request to the polytechnic to provide credibility. Potential members of the examining board were approached on the basis that the course would take place. Formal agreement by ILEA arrived just prior to the presentation of the scheme to the tourism sub-committee. Greenwich Borough's formal agreement took place in March. Thames Polytechnic registry agreed, formally, to the examining body five weeks later in April.

The third stage

Crucial to the original concept of the scheme was the presentation of a badge to the qualified guides. It would both mark public validation of people who had been unemployed for a long time and serve as their introduction to pai[illegible]ork. The borough had agreed to produce the badge in time for a[illegible]l presentation. The badge was eventually produced, but only aft[illegible]had himself designed it, delivered it to the engravers in North Lon[illegible], and collected the finished product.

The presentation took place on the *Cutty Sark* in August. The Mayor of Greenwich presented the badges and certificates to the eight students who qualified, and a short speech was made by the deputy leader. A press statement was issued by the borough and the guides were featured in the local press and by Thames Television. Overall, the presentation marked a successful completion of this stage of the scheme.

Year two

The second year of the project saw the consoldiation of the 'Guides to Greenwich' course. The course was extended to two terms – September to April – to include other areas of the borough besides tourist Greenwich. Participants from the first course were invited to join the second. T.P. turned out to be an excellent tutor, able to convey his own enthusiasm for the subject to others. He continued to tutor the practical side of the course, do most of the research and initiate visits. The adult education institute helped produce publicity material, and the organisation became smoother with the Tourism Manager now contributing. The community education worker at the institute arranged for both tutors to join teacher training courses. Thames Polytechnic CEU engaged T.P. for a two-hour 'sister' course, at West Greenwich House, to work with students on local research of personal and social history.

The examining board

Five interest groups were represented on the board: the London Borough of Greenwich, Thamesside Adult Education Institute, Thames Polytechnic, 'Guides to Greenwich' tutors, and the project worker. The borough representatives were the Assistant Director of Leisure (later replaced by the Tourism Manager), the two borough archivists who acted as the external examiners, and the co-ordinator of the Economic Development Unit. The Adult Education Institute was represented by a community education worker. Thames Polytechnic was represented by two lecturers – a social historian and a sociologist who had conducted research into local history. Thus the examining board embraced disparate interests and a wide range of approaches to education and training.

The borough was very concerned about the vocational respectability of the course. Training approaches for tourist guides tend towards a vocational and marketing thrust which emphasises presentation – including clothes and speech. The academic representatives were keen to emphasise the pedagogic dimensions of the course – challenging the authority of historical 'facts' and raising historiographic questions around 'who makes history'. This concern raised critical questions

about appropriate modes of assessment and evaluation. (The City of London examination, for example, is entirely in written form.)

Considerable agreement was reached. The aim of the board is to produce a marketable commodity with the status of other tourist badges. It has been keen to assert assessment criteria which are markedly different from more traditional tourist guide courses. If older unwaged people are to participate and experience is to be utilised, then the assessment criteria of the Blue Badge examiners and the London Convention and Tourist Board need to be reviewed. In the Greenwich tourist guide scheme a different mode of historical research is adopted, using the student's own knowledge and experience of living and working in the borough. The course includes continual assessment with presentations from students' own research. The final examination is primarily practical, and also includes elements of student research.

The guides

On qualifying, the first group of guides formed the Greenwich Guides Association. A committee was elected. They organised a rota to staff a stall in a prime position in Greenwich, produced publicity, and acquired some guiding work.

From the beginning, the association was beset with problems, some of them arising from disappointment. Complaints were made about the uncertainty of the work, the periods without remuneration, and the lack of input by the borough. Both the project worker and the Tourism Manager repeated their previous offers to arrange help and advice of forming a co-operative, or on applying for a grant as a business unit.

Although people on the Guides Scheme had been warned that it did not guarantee work, they had underestimated the cost of pursuing work, of generating demand. It was necessary for at least two Greenwich Guides Association members to be at the Greenwich pitch every day throughout the summer period to establish themselves as guides, and to gain work. This meant that fares and other expenses were consistent when work was sporadic. The guides estimated that they failed to break even during the summer of 1986. While some saw this as a necessary step in the expansion of the scheme, others concluded that the effort was not worth while.

If older long-term unwaged people are to be drawn into such schemes, it is vital that they be adequately prepared. They must be made aware of the probems involved and provided with the skills to deal with these problems. Lack of experience and knowhow of the business world meant a weakness in the way the scheme developed. Too little time was spent on ensuring a smooth transition from the educational experience and the achievement of a qualification to the means by which these could be used as earning power. It is hoped that future 'Guides to Greenwich' courses will be accompanied by a course on business options, management skills, committee procedure, publicity and use of the media, research skills, interpersonal and communication skills, and familiarisation of the working of the local state.

The scheme highlighted a number of issues in working with older long-term unwaged people. They undergo many transitions, such as the change from manual to mental work, the change from educational courses to vocational outcomes, etc. These areas are discussed in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

The tourist guide scheme is now in existence. Older long-term unwaged people have qualified from the 'Guides to Greenwich' course in 1986 and 1987. They have received considerable publicity through the offices of the borough, the local press, Thames Television, and the London Weekend Television Unemployment Campaign, 'Out of Work and over 40?'. Three guides are employed by 'Insight Tours'; others have found

guiding work through the Greenwich Guides Association (which has three members regularly available for guiding groups from Greenwich each weekend) and have also been provided with tour work directly through the borough's tourism office. Research on local history has also been commissioned by the Tourism Manager. In the summer of 1987, the existing members of the Association and the newly qualified guides were expecting to have the advantage of a kiosk at Greenwich pier provided by the borough.

Both 'Guides to Greenwich' courses were enjoyed by the participants. Interest in local history was developed and course participants gained skills for further research into local history. A working relationship has been established between two education institutions and the various offices of the borough.

The examining board has contributed an innovative approach to courses for training guides. A course now exists for older people without formal academic qualifications which positively values their experience and which provides professional status as a tourist guide and the means to develop or further an interest in local history.

To the institutions, one of the attractions of the scheme was its unusual pedigree of being the initiative of a local unwaged older ex-manual worker, rather than a scheme dreamt up by the employed on behalf of the unemployed. The unemployed are advised to identify market demands and encouraged to seek self-employment. The experience of the guide scheme shows the tremendous barriers confronting people attempting to follow this advice. The following chapter discusses the implications of this experience more fully.

Note

The tourist agency, Insight Tours, is now in operation – set up by the two GAGOU members formerly involved in the scheme. A borough guides badge was first acquired from the 'Guides to Greenwich' course. At present, the two developments do not work together.

4 TRANSITIONS

ISSUES RAISED BY THE PROJECT

For many older long-term unemployed people, the period between redundancy and retirement is a waste land. This project was concerned with challenging that perception by exploring the potential of education, training and leisure provision. The target group focused attention on three significant movements: between paid work and unemployment, between unemployment and education, and between education and vocational outcomes. Exploring these transitions raised a number of issues. First, the discrimination experienced by older unwaged people when they seek re-employment and retraining. Common-sense notions about age, held by both students and providers, limit alternative conceptions of education and work activity. Second, there are cultural and economic factors to transition. One aspect of this is the pain of change experienced in the transition from paid work to unemployment; individuals experience the loss of the wage packet as well as social isolation. Associated with this painful change are the practical, cultural and personal difficulties of moving from one form of working life to another. The discussion below focuses on these difficulties, particularly as they relate to a switch from manual to mental labour. Third, the response of providers and other agencies engaged with older unwaged people undergoing these transitions is considered. The experience of the project suggests that education and training providers will need to have an increased awareness of the situation in which older unwaged people find themselves. Fourth, issues relating to educational provision for older people, especially the assessment of prior learning and the transition from education to vocation, are raised.

CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS OF TRANSITION

The passage from paid work, through an extended period of unemployment, to a new form of activity is characterised by a lengthy relearning period in which it is necessary to unlearn the specific skills and experiences which unemployed people may have acquired in their former work, and to acquire the new skills, interpersonal relations, and working practices which they need in a new form of work. If the transition entails a shift from manual to mental work, the changes can be painful. Three particular areas of stress are identified here: conditions of service (pay and time structures); presentation of self; and dealing with bureaucracies. The experience of the project suggests a number of adjustments have to be made by all those involved, both by the unwaged participants and by staff of the participating institutions. The illustrative quotations which follow are drawn from a lengthy interview with T.P., the instigator of the tourist guide scheme.

Conditions of service

Pay

The weekly wage packet, or even a benefit Giro, provides some certainty of regular income. Participants in the tourist guide scheme received money irregularly and unpredictably. Such change in methods of payment is perceived as a budgeting difficulty, particularly where a

small income from part-time work is concerned – even when that income amounts to more than that received on the dole:

> 'It doesn't seem as if you're really being paid, does it? . . . Although, mind you, over these years I've got used to it now, not seeing a wage packet every week. But I think I'd like to see it that way . . . I'd still like to know it's coming in every Thursday or Friday whatever.'

Time structure

This has two aspects for older unemployed people: the loss of work-related time structure, and differences in the use of time between manual and mental work. The time structure of the day changes when people become unemployed. As the interviewees explained, time can become undisciplined. The day passes without anything of note being accomplished. This contrasts with the sense of urgency to find work which prevents time being spent on alternative activities. Reduced income can lead to less effective use of time. Contact with individuals and organisations relies on 'foot-slogging' rather than the telephone.

Changing from manual to mental work requires a different use of time. For T.P., the change from work in the docks to part-time teaching meant,

> 'I find it's probably like working for yourself now. It's disciplining yourself to sit down and do it. I'm a character who does love being out. I can't sit in a house to save my life. I begrudge sitting indoors. I feel that when I'm sitting indoors I'm being lazy . . . Being out and walking round is being active – even if it isn't looking for work, it's a form of doing something. I can't accept the fact yet that this is where my work is, sitting down.'

Staying at home is associated with being sick or having the day off. Thus 'you still feel guilty about it . . .'.

This distinction between the use of time in manual and mental work also colours the perceptions of manual workers to people engaged in mental work. Thus the flexibility of the time structure, for many of those engaged in the more privileged areas of mental work, was not understood by the unemployed group. In this study, the presumption was often made that if office staff are not in their office, then they are either not working or avoiding contact.

Self-presentation

For ex-manual workers, the distinction between 'us' and 'them' can be extended to include all people engaged in mental labour. Such perceptions colour their interaction with professionals. Thus, engagement with educational institutions can initially contribute to further feelings of inadequacy. Social class was identified as hindering a positive response by staff in the institutions approached in connection with the guides scheme:

> 'Well, it's the look you get I think when you go into these offices . . . I do honestly think in a lot of situations it's face value first, it's how you're dressed . . . and I think from the moment you open your mouth . . . "I'm Mr So and so, I've come to see you about . . ." "Oh." And they're just looking at you . . . "Oh yes, yes, it sounds a good idea. Look I haven't got much time to look at it . . .".'

This perception of the response then determines the subsequent behaviour.

Dealing with bureaucracies

The interviews, particularly the in-depth follow-up interview, demonstrated that enthusiasm and incentive alone were insufficient to deal with educational institutions and borough bureaucracies. The older unemployed people interviewed were unfamiliar with office procedure and had inappropriate expectations. This hindered the

progress of the tourist guide scheme, since misunderstandings were legion.

When members of the tourist guide scheme attempted to contact people in connection with the scheme, they invariably made visits to offices on an *ad hoc* basis rather than by pre-arranged appointments. Lack of information about procedure, and an unfamiliarity with official language, can make bureaucracies seem mystifying.

Techniques and strategies for dealing with bureaucracies were suggested during the project: for example, making appointments with named individuals, noting down the main points to raise, using a diary, and filing correspondence.

Attitudes of providers and staff of other agencies

The responses experienced by an older unwaged manual worker to the tourist guide scheme raise a number of issues about interaction for the professional worker. Two, apparently contradictory, responses can arise. On the one hand, there is a danger in underestimating the resources available to unemployed people and the behavioural patterns that this can produce. On the other hand, there is the danger of categorising unwaged people as 'the unemployed'. Both responses can be exacerbated by the divisions between mental and manual labour.

The distinction between mental and manual work, which accords mental work the higher status, leads to underestimation of the value of the prior learning acquired by older manual workers of both sexes. Assessment based on self-presentation, on speech patterns, social conduct and formal academic qualifications hinders appreciation of potential contributions that may have to be made.

TRANSITION AND EDUCATION

Defining wagelessness primarily in negative and disabling terms draws attention away from the potentially positive aspects of education provision and the ambivalent experiences of waged work. Among the interviewees in the sample, for example, were unemployed people seeking support for creative alternatives to their previous employment. The emphasis on education as a 'coping' medium restricts its ability to salvage 'some of the human potential which would otherwise be damaged or dissipated' (NIACE, 1984, p. 14).

This raised the issue of an alternative scenario for education. Education is not irrelevant to older, unwaged people. It has the potential to open up opportunities previously denied them. However, attracting unwaged people, particularly older, male, ex-manual workers, to education presents problems to providers. There are the problems of resistance, of marketing, and of positively evaluating the target group.

A deeply embedded cultural resistance to schooling can mean an antipathy to formal education. For many, the experience of compulsory schooling gives rise to certain expectations of what courses should look like. This is particularly relevant to the manual worker with little experience of post-school education. There are strong expectations of pedagogic relations based on unequal power and status, individuality, and formal certification of achievement. Courses which exemplify these expectations repeat the experience of formal schooling. However, where provision is designed to avoid the structures of formal schooling, alternative approaches can initially fail to attract students. Courses like MEC may be too unfamiliar and suggest a weak version of teaching. They do not fit familiar classifications of what courses are about and what they offer. They do not have a subject label and, unlike much schooling, take re-evaluation and critique as a priority. In addition, the MEC project takes personal experience as a primary resource.

More traditionally framed courses – for example job hunting, interview techniques and skills update – do not present an unfamiliar form of education. They repeat patterns of school experience and so appear legitimate – to both providers and students. The negative consequences of such provision can be that they repeat the inappropriate power and control relations of a school experience. Courses with an apparently close relation to vocational concerns are not necessarily integrated into local labour markets. They cannot generate jobs. Thus the effect of such courses may be to alienate students further from even considering those courses which have wider educational horizons.

The success of the 'Guides to Greenwich' course lay both in its clearly vocational appeal and in its radical assessment, pedagogy and curriculum. Its short length, public validation and earning potential were clearly identifiable attractions. The concern of its hidden curriculum was to combat any negative experiences of schooling. Its pedagogy utilised the participants' experience of living and working in Greenwich, the importance of their contribution being legitimised by the social status of the tutor – an older unemployed ex-manual worker. Tutor/student relations were further restructured by participants being encouraged to question facts, and by incorporating their own individual and group research as a necessary component of the course. Group collaboration was encouraged, helping to dismantle the individualism and isolation associated with formal schooling and long-term unemployment, while a back-up service by the adult education institute in written skills helped to avoid potential failure due to inadequate past schooling. All this meant that the course provided for the immediate vocational concerns of the students as well as promoting an interest and means for further study.

THE TRANSITION FROM EDUCATION TO VOCATION

A further issue is raised by the experience of the guides once the course had finished and they began to seek employment. This is the problem of how education courses can prepare people for the experience of acquiring financial remuneration for their skills, particularly where the intention is to achieve self-employment or to start small businesses. The problems which beset the Greenwich Guides Association imply that attention should be given to ensuring a smooth transition from the relatively protected circumstances enjoyed while gaining a qualification to the reality of the business world where the qualification is used as a means of earning a living. In this case, the education course clearly needs to be accompanied by courses in business options and marketing skills, management and committee procedure, and interpersonal and communication skills.

Education provision for older unwaged people can offer a positive alternative to previous educational experience and to unemployment. The issues that arise from experience of this project suggest that much needs to be done to service the needs of older unwaged people. A recognition of the lived experience of older people can offer much, both to them as individuals and to the community.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This project underlined the effects of long-term unemployment in a society which provides power, status and identity through paid work. Older people, especially those without family networks, are isolated in a social environment which is geared to the workplace, the family and youth. The project illustrated the difficulties encountered by those who seek to re-establish themselves in working activities, especially in the community. Detailed recording of these difficulties indicated that they arise for a number of reasons: first, the effects of long-term unemployment on older people; second, the interaction of people with differing experiences of class; third, the kinds of responses often made to long-term unwaged people by providers.

The experiences of long-term unwaged people clearly differ fundamentally from those of people in paid work. While people in employment may suffer isolation, apathy, alienation, powerlessness and poverty, the unwaged typically experience these conditions in a markedly different way. Unwaged people are defined, by themselves and by wider social structures, as a separate category. The interaction between the unwaged and the providers of education, training and leisure is marked by the fact that the latter are themselves in paid work.

The people in the project sample of those in their mid- to late-50s who had been made redundant against their choice were not content to sit out their years until they reached the official pensionable age. They wanted to be economically active; they wanted to use their time in activities they consider worth while. The desire for activity and a sense of purpose among older unwaged people came clearly through the interviews. Active participation in what is perceived as worthwhile activity is crucial to retaining and re-establishing the individual's sense of self. Participation in the community, for example, can present a positive alternative to paid work, especially when work has been of a routine nature. The main problems that emerge are how to present alternatives to paid work as worthwhile activities to people who have become immobilised by the loss of paid work, and how such alternatives can provide both adequate support and income.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The main achievement of the project was the support it provided to, and the development it enabled of, the tourist guides scheme. Two courses were completed during the project, with two sets of older people qualifying as tourist guides. Presentation of a guides badge marked public validation of their achievement. An avenue for earning was opened. The scheme enabled a number of people to become active in their local community. Barriers were removed so that T.P. could realise a scheme and create an avenue of opportunity for other unwaged people. The project enabled the initiator of the guides scheme to be trained and paid as a tutor.

Stated baldly, these achievements are positive enough. Closer inspection, however, reveals that it was particular features of the research programme which provided the necessary conditions for these events.

Making Experience Count The CEU at Thames Polytechic has, for some years, been developing pedagogic techniques for the assessment of prior learning. This institutional background provided the framework for the project. The course illustrated the value of prior learning to older unwaged people. It provided a context in which members of the course positively re-evaluated their learned experience. The collaborative basis of the course provided a social context valued by older unwaged people. The re-evaluation that took place opened up other options. MEC provided a starting-point from which the 'Guides to Greenwich' course for the tourist guide scheme was developed.

As a result of the positive personal reassessments made possible by the course, students were able to move away from the fatalism associated with long-term unemployment and construct wider horizons of opportunity. The significant step from liberal education to vocational training was made possible by the preliminary process of recognising and assessing prior learning.

Flexibility The central concern of the project to respond to the perceptions of the target group meant that built in from the start was readiness to respond to any initiatives that might come from work with the target group. Support for the tourist guide scheme arose from responding to a remark at the GAGOU meeting with older unwaged members. The idea was not, of course, presented as a clear project, and initially no support was sought.

The point here is that the project's interest in prior learning meant that it was entirely appropriate for it to respond to the specific experiences that came from working with older unemployed people. Work of this kind cannot, and indeed should not, try to blueprint outcomes from the start. There may be possibilities in some suitable areas of the country for the replication of tourist-type schemes to take place. However, the argument is that what should be repeated is a procedure that recognises the importance of working with, and from, the experiences of the unemployed themselves. 'Making Experience Count' means getting to know the character of the experiences, taking them seriously and being prepared to respond in the variety of directions that they may suggest.

Collaborative inter-institutional relations The project worker was supported by a wide range of institutions and agencies. These included Thames Polytechnic, GRETA, GERU, the borough's Community Education Unit, and community centres. An important requisite for the success of the tourist guide scheme was the establishment of a working network between institutions: in particular, the London Borough of Greenwich, Thames Polytechnic, and the adult education institute. There was every indication that this collaboration would continue beyond the life of the project. One of the more specific outcomes of this networking was the examining board set up to monitor the 'Guides to Greenwich' course.

The examining board The board brought together people with disparate approaches to education and training. It included students from the guide course itself, and this forum for discussing details of assessment, teaching strategies and course content provided a profoundly educative process in its own right. Experience on the board brought the group to face squarely the issues of the relationships between informally acquired learning and the conventional modes of educational accreditation. It enabled them to experience the effect of sustained critique. The seemingly innate obduracy of historical knowledge and the equally unchangeable character of the content of a 'proper' guides curriculum were seen to be alterable after meetings in which persistent self-questioning took place. At the same time, the central problem of redefining what counts as the appropriate knowledge

for a guide in this new definition, while still sustaining the legitimacy of the course and of the job, was explored. For example, the question was asked: can we depart radically from . . . 'proper' accents and 'proper' evaluation to new assessments which will still be recognised?

The project illustrated the low profile of older unwaged people, and the methodological problem of how to contact the target group remained unresolved.

Older people, in the main, are not targeted for employment, retraining, or education provision.

There are few social venues for people in their 40s and 50s with poor economic resoures. Unemployment centres often cater for a younger age group, while clubs cater either for the young or for pensioners.

Older people, made redundant, feel there is insufficient support for them. In response to questions about the value of counselling, interviewees expressed its inadequacy and their lack of preparedness for long-term unemployment. They made a number of suggestions to improve counselling. (The interviews took place before the introduction of the Restart programme with its 'counselling' component. Discussions with older unemployed people who have since participated in Restart imply that the concern to improve counselling remains valid.)

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational providers and employers should develop a range of strategies aimed to demonstrate that they welcome older people as students and workers.

The list of those groups against which education services (and, increasingly, employers) have to state they do not discriminate is already long. Nevertheless, just as typical educational provision is marked by clear divisions on the basis of sex, class and race, so is it divided by age. Just as it is normal to find few women on science and technology courses, so it is normal to find older people absent from a whole range of educational provision from which they are not formally excluded. The project demonstrated the relative invisibility of this group and the importance of increased awareness on the part of providers and employers. The 'normal' associations of education with school and of school with youth means that positive countervailing strategies need to be developed. Appending references to older people in advertising and all marketing activities is a necessary condition for progress here. To work effectively, such strategies require as much work as the eradication of sexism or racism. A start should be made on this lengthy process – a process that needs to recognise the importance of prior learning and, therefore, of the consequences for pedagogy, assessment and curriculum content of having older unemployed people as students.

Educational providers should monitor the ages of their students to establish their age profiles and should compare these with the local populations from which they are aiming to recruit.

Once educational providers of all kinds, including adult educators, study the age profiles of their students, it will become clear that their current practices fail to attract older students. Employers should not exclude older people from waged opportunities from which any rational criteria would not preclude them.

Educational providers should utilise existing 'early warning systems' which warn of forthcoming or recent redundancies in order that they may work with groups at the earliest phases of unemployment.

Unemployment is often initially experienced positively, as a release from the monotony of waged work, and an opportunity exists for educators to work in a wide range of ways that need not be solely vocational. Educational provision that attempts to operate as a remedy to the psychological ills accompanying unemployment has a restricted utility. This points to the early involvement of education at the point at which waged workers are about to be or have recently become unemployed.

Groups aiming to provide resource centres for older unemployed people should model themselves on the social relations of buying and selling. They should revolve around specific purposeful meetings.

It was found that older unemployed men and women felt most comfortable in venues which adopted the forms of commercial places like shops and fast-food restaurants. The label 'unemployed' is undesirable and people were understandably reluctant to identify

themselves as being members of a group on that basis. However, where the venue was in or near a shopping centre, people felt more comfortable visiting it than if it looked, for example, like the local housing office. In addition, such centres should provide a number of activities unrelated to the concerns of employment, unemployment education or training. The people contacted also supported the view that such centres need to provide the basis for some purposeful meetings and not be of the 'drop-in' and 'hang-around' variety which they described so unenthusiastically. Indeed, any work and resources aimed at helping unemployed people must be specific and purposeful.

Educational providers should consider whether their provision for older unemployed people could be more varied.

It is easy for educational providers to follow the well-tested routes of putting on a course. Often, institutional practices, including accounting procedures, encourage nothing else. However, it may be possible, with no extra cost, to offer centres with at least some of the characteristics referred to above.

These may only be opened for specific periods of time and their location may be restricted. Nevertheless, varying the format of provision in this way will attract greater numbers of older unemployed people.

Educational providers and local councils should create or develop provision which enables them to respond directly to *ad hoc* initiatives from unemployed people.

In the area in which the project took place, the local council publicly displays the local unemployment figures, and its policies include efforts to combat unemployment. This concern for local unemployment levels was certainly shared by many individual officers and councillors. The same concern was also common among many of the local educational institutions. It was therefore ironic that direct approaches from the unemployed met so many difficulties. The problem appeared to be that institutions frequently operate with structures that divide and assign areas of responsibility. Direct approaches are not easily accommodated, particularly if they entail suggestions that do not fit neatly into existing divisions of responsibility. Units or individuals should be given specific responsibility for making direct responses to approaches from unemployed people and for encouraging such responses. The advantages of such units would be to provide people familiar with the workings of the institutions who would be better able to pursue initiatives put to them.

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OBJECTIVES

The objectives for which **The Further Education Unit (FEU)** is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;

b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvements can be effected;

c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of, further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;

d) to disseminate and publish, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of, information about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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